

Message Text

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42

ACTION SY-05

INFO OCT-01 ARA-06 ISO-00 PC-01 SCCT-01 USSS-00 EUR-12

IO-11 SSO-00 NSCE-00 SS-15 NSC-05 CIAE-00 INR-07

NSAE-00 A-01 /065 W

----- 042705

R 052150Z MAR 76

FM AMEMBASSY TEGUCIGALPA

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 2705

INFO AMEMBASSY SAN SALVADOR

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E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: ASEC

SUBJECT: EXTORTION ATTEMPT

1. A CRUDE, HAND-WRITTEN NOTE DEMANDING 500 LEMPIRAS(U.S. \$250) WAS DELIVERED TO THE HOME OF PEACE CORPS DIRECTOR STEVEN SMITH AT 3:30 P.M. MARCH 3, 1976. THE NOTE WAS HANDED DIRECTLY TO MR. SMITH'S WIFE BY A MALE HONDURAN, APPROXIMATELY 20 YEARS OF AGE. MRS. SMITH NOTICED THE MESSENGER HAD SEVERAL SIMILAR LOOKING ENVELOPES IN HIS POSSESSION. THE NOTE PURPORTED TO BE FROM A GROUP CALLING ITSELF "ARMED REVOLUTIONARY PARTY OF THE PEOPLE" (PARP). THIS ORGANIZATION IS UNKNOWN TO THE EMBASSY. THE NOTE STATED THAT THE MONEY SHOULD BE PUT INTO A WHITE ENVELOPE AND TAKEN BY MR. SMITH TO A WELL-KNOWN DOWNTOWN SHOPPING ARCADE AT 10 A.M. THURSDAY MARCH 4TH. THE WRITER OF THE NOTE PROFESSED THAT NO ILL WILL WAS INTENDED AGAINST MR. SMITH; HOWEVER, HE AND HIS WIFE WOULD BE KILLED IF THE INSTRUCTIONS WERE NOT CARRIED OUT. LOCAL POLICE AUTHORITIES (DIN) WERE CONTACTED. THE POLICE WERE OF THE OPINION THAT IT WAS A DELINQUENT EXTORTION ATTEMPT AND THEY RECOMMENDED THAT MR. SMITH KEEP THE APPOINTMENT WITH A DUMMY ENVELOPE, UNDER CLOSE PLAIN CLOTHES POLICE SURVEILLANCE. MR. SMITH WAS AGREEABLE AND THE EMBASSY, AFTER REVIEWING THE PLAN WITH POLICE, APPROVED IT. THE PSO WAS

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POSTIONED IN A BOOK STORE WHICH GAVE FULL VISIBILITY OF THE

TARGET AREA. MR. SMITH ARRIVED AT THE SCHEDULED TIME BY TAXI, FOLLOWED THE NOTE'S INSTRUCTIONS FOR TWENTY MINUTES, AT WHICH TIME BY PRIOR AGREEMENT NO CONTACT HAVING BEEN MADE, MR. SMITH AND THE PSO RETURNED TO DIN BY SEPARATE VEHICLES. AT THIS TIME IT WAS AGREED THT DIN WOULD PROVIDE A GUARD AT MR. SMITH'S RESIDENCE IN ADDITION TO ONE ALREADY POSTED IN THE GENERAL AREA.

2. AT 3:30 P.M. MARCH 4TH MR. SMITH RECEIVED A PHONE CALL FROM HIS WIFE INFORMING HIM THAT THE INDIVIDUAL WHO DELIVERED THE NOTE HAD RETURNED AND WAS KNOCKING ON THEIR DOOR. MR. SMITH IMMEDIATELY RETURNED HOME AND FOUND THE MAN AT HIS FRONT DOOR. HE MADE NO ATTEMPT TO FLEE, RATHER, HE IMMEDIATELY ENGAGED MR. SMITH IN CONVERSATION. HE SAID THAT HE HAD RETURNED TO APOLOGIZE FOR THE NOTE AND THAT HE HAD BEEN FORCED TO DELIVER IT BY PARP UNDER THREATS OF DEATH TO HIMSELF AND HIS FAMILY. IN ESSENCE HIS STORY WAS THAT NINE DAYS PRIOR HE HAD BEEN RECRUITED INTO PARP'S SERVICES AT THE UNIVERSITY AND TAKEN BLINDFOLDED TO A HOUSE WHERE A GROUP OF HOODED PERSONS HAD DISPLAYED A CACHE OF WEAPONS. PERSONAL INFORMATION CONCERNING HIM AND HIS IMMEDIATE FAMILY WAS RECITED, I.E., PLACES OF BIRTH, AGES, HOME AND BUSINESS ADDRESSES, AND HE WAS WARNED THAT IF HE DID NOT COOPERATE THEY ALL WOULD BE KILLED. HIS FIRST MISSION WAS TO DELIVER THE NOTE TO MR. SMITH. HE BELIEVES THAT A DUTCHMAN WHO ARRIVED IN THE COUNTRY 30 DAYS AGO PLUS TWO CANADIANS ARE INVOLVED IN PARP. HE STATED THAT ONE OF THE HOODED GROUP SPOKE POOR, HEAVILY ACCENTED SPANISH. ALTHOUGH ONE MEMBER ALLEGEDLY WAS PREVIOUSLY CONNECTED WITH THE MANO BLANCA IN GUATEMALA, THE YOUNG MAN PROFESSED TO BE UNCERTAIN OF THE IDEOLOGICAL ORIENTATION OF PARP. HOWEVER, HE SAID THAT ONE OF ITS OBJECTIVES, HE WAS TOLD, WAS TO REDUCE THE "GRINGO PRESENCE" IN HONDURAS.

3. MR. SMITH SAYS THE MAN WAS IN AN AGITATED STATE AND APPEARED GENUINELY FRIGHTENED. MR. SMITH TOLD HIM THAT HE SHOULD IMMEDIATELY GO TO DIN AS HE WOULD ONLY CONTINUE TO GET INTO FURTHER, MORE SERIOUS DIFFICULTIES. HE REJECTED THIS SUGGESTION BUT SAID HE WOULD GO TO DIN AT 7:30 THAT EVENING. HE THEN DEPARTED MR. SMITH'S AND SUBSEQUENTLY DID NOT APPEAR AT DIN.

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4. EMBASSY HAS JUST BEEN ADVISED THAT INDIVIDUAL CONCERNED, PLUS A WOMAN ACCOMPLICE, WAS APPREHENDED BY POLICE MARCH 5 WHILE ENGAGED IN A SIMILAR EXTORTION ATTEMPT AGAINST CHILEAN U.N. EMPLOYEE. ADDRESSEES WILL BE ADVISED OF FURTHER DETAILS AS THEY BECOME AVAILABLE. DIN WILL CONTINUE TO PROVIDE GUARD AT MR. SMITH'S RESIDENCE UNTIL CASE RESOLVED. SANCHEZ

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Draft Date: 05 MAR 1976
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Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Authority: buchant0
Disposition Case Number: n/a
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Disposition Event:
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Disposition Reason:
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Margaret P. Grafeld
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